

## Marriage And The Bride Of Christ (Part 7)

The Cleansing of the Bride

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When Christians have marriage problems, they often forget to address them from God's perspective. It is interesting how stress can cause people to lay aside their Christian values in favor of humanly reasoned solutions. There have always been marriage problems within families in the church and there are various reasons for them. Today, I want to emphasize the solution to many of them.

Married life is always very busy, especially when both husband and wife work, add to that caring for and educating their children, and you have an almost impossible situation with regard to the spiritual health of each member of the family. Often husbands and wives neglect their reading and studying of God's Word under these conditions. Marriage problems always develop when the study of God's Word is neglected, because the Christian husband and wife are hindering the required cleansing of the Bride of Christ. It is a very serious spiritual matter as well.

Each baptized member of the church—both male and female—have the responsibility of working with Christ the Bridegroom, as He sanctifies, cleanses, and purifies His Bride, which we know to be God's church and its individual members. Each married Christian must strive to live his life according to the principles that are taught in Scripture. Christian marriage is characterized by the governing of oneself according to spiritual principles that are taught in God's inspired written Word.

How can a Christian improve the quality of his and her marriage? Stated negatively—How can a member of God's church avoid impeding the essential cleansing of the Bride?

**Ephesians 5:25-33** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great

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mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In considering the statement that the apostle Paul makes concerning the duty of husbands towards their wives, we are focusing on the teaching concerning Jesus Christ in His relationship to His church. We have seen Christ's concern for her, His attitude with respect to her; and we are emphasizing how this attitude and concern have expressed themselves in action, and in practice.

Paul compares the sacrificial responsibility of a husband and wife in marriage to Christ's sacrificial love for the church. In turn, the church has a responsibility, both as individual members and as a body, to reciprocate that love back to Him. The husband or wife who gives sacrificial love also benefits from the sacrifices that he or she makes.

In my earlier sermons on 'Marriage and Family', we have seen what Christ has done for the church, 'He gave Himself for her.' But Christ does not leave it at that; He goes on doing something to the church and for the church. We have been also looking at the word 'sanctify' and its meaning. Christ set the church apart for Himself; we are His 'special people,' a people for His own special possession, His bride. He set her aside and apart in order that He may do certain things for her.

From that point we now continue on to the next word, which is the word 'cleanse.'

Reading here in Ephesians 5:26: 'that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the word.'

It is by way of this word 'cleanse' that the idea of purifying—what we normally call 'sanctification'—really comes in.

There seems to be an allusion here, in Ephesians 5, to the ancient method of cleansing and purifying women. It was common for virgin women to be appointed to be consorts to kings. This could take as long as twelve months for this purification. Esther is a vivid example of this very thing. In Esther's case her purifying took six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors and with other things.

**Esther 2:12-18** Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation

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apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name. Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

It is important to understand the full content of this word 'cleansed.' There are some who try to confine it solely to our being washed from bearing the responsibility of our sins as in baptism. But that, clearly, is not enough. We have already found that aspect in the statement that He gave Himself for the church and separated her. Christ certainly cleanses us from the guilt and bearing the penalty of our sins; but His 'Word' takes us still further than that.

The very fact that Paul adds, in Ephesians 5:26, that the cleansing is effected 'with the washing of water by the word' is proof that it is a continuous and continuing process, and it is the process of conversion, and the process of sanctification 'that He might cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.' That statement shows that it is not only a matter of getting rid of the guilt.

But then Ephesians 5:27 establishes the matter still more positively, "that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." So this cleansing is not something that just happens instantaneously, and it takes time just as it did in the purifying of Esther in preparation for the king. In our cases it can take a lifetime.

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These words define Christ's ultimate objective that the church should not only be delivered from guilt and bearing the penalty of sin, but that she should be delivered entirely and completely from sin in every shape and form. The New Testament never stops at the guilt; it always goes on to this further idea of our being cleansed from the power of sin as well. In addition, this cleansing is not only from guilt and bearing the penalty of sin, and from the power of sin, but it is also from the pollution of sin.

The third aspect, the pollution of sin is frequently forgotten. You will find that many churches in their 'statement of beliefs' mention the power of sin, but leave out the pollution of sin. Sin is powerfully working within us and must be overcome. This is what Paul describes in Romans 7:

**Romans 7:18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

So even Paul, with many of the good godly attributes that he had still worked hard throughout his entire life to overcome, those sins that would pop up.

Now that is pollution; that is not power. It leads to power; but it is because our natures are polluted, and are tarnished, and are dirty, and made unclean by sin. Sin is so powerful within us. Therefore we need to be cleansed not only from the guilt, and not only from the power, but specifically from this terrible pollution of sin, and the stain of it all and the perversion. As we live our lives as Christians, over the years, there should be less and less of this.

It is vitally important that we realize that our human natures tend toward being twisted and perverted. That is if we allow our human natures to go the way of the world, or if we allow the world to persuade us, and entice us. It is not that we are neutral by nature, not at all. Paul has already stated this at the beginning of his second chapter, where he says that 'we were dead in trespasses and sins,' and so on. And he talks about 'the lusts of the flesh and of the mind.'

That is another way of describing this 'law within my members.' It is not only a power, it is an infection; it definitely is a pollution. It is like a stream that is polluted from its very source, rather than one that becomes polluted during its course. Of course, as we receive the Holy Spirit it gives us the power to overcome those sins.

This is the thing from which we have to be cleansed before we can be presented by

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Jesus Christ to Himself.

**Ephesians 5:27** that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The question for us therefore is: How is this cleansing accomplished?

**Ephesians 5:25-27** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

So the apostle Paul says here that it is done 'with the washing of water by the word.' Here we have an important and a very difficult phrase—a phrase that has often been misunderstood and misinterpreted.

The focus in these verses is on Christ, because husbands do not "sanctify" their wives or "wash" them of their sins, though husbands are to do all in their power to help establish a peaceful environment that is conducive to their wives' sanctification; and vice-versa. That alone is a tremendous responsibility that we husbands have.

**James 3:18** Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

So we husbands have the responsibility, as do the wives and mothers, of making sure that our homes are peaceful, so that the fruit of the Spirit can grow there.

As Christ loves the church and provides peace for her, so also should a husband manifest similar love toward his wife, and a similar desire that she would be prepared to 'walk before him in white.' White represents purity and righteousness. Anciently, a virgin was purified and prepared for her husband by washing and by anointing, likewise, but in a more glorious way the church is to be prepared for Christ. She is to be made pure and holy. All this was to be accomplished by way of the truth, and by the instrumentality of the Word of God.

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By that truth they were to be sanctified. In accordance with that, the whole work from the commencement to the close was to be accomplished, and this is accomplished by the faithful application of truth, or the Word, to the heart.

What, then, does this phrase "washing of water by the word" teach?

Ephesians 5:26, is not a direct reference to water baptism, however, there is an initial cleansing that takes place during water baptism, and we are forgiven of our previous sins; they are wiped away clean.

And so we find the apostle Paul expressing this in writing to the church at Corinth.

**I Corinthians 6:9-11** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

There again the same idea of 'washing' is used. Paul says, 'we were like that; but we are no longer in that condition; we are now saints in the church, and we have been washed.' One of the purposes of water baptism is to represent that initial change, but the process of sanctification must continue. And so, we find the apostle Paul carrying the explanation of cleansing beyond that initial cleansing, and showing that cleansing is a continuous process. It is the process of sanctification.

The children of Israel are called the congregation of Israel beginning in Exodus 12:3. Israel was established as a civil and a religious body. And, as you know, over time she became abominable and filthy because of her sins, and therefore rejected by the pure and righteous God. In Ezekiel 36, Israel's restoration in the future is prophesied to be more than just physical—it will be a spiritual restoration that takes place at the beginning of the millennium.

Now notice the similarity of what the Eternal will do to Israel and what Christ is doing to the church.

**Ezekiel 36:25** Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

This does not refer to water baptism. In Old Testament times sprinkling, or washing with water, pictured cleansing from ceremonial defilement. Israel's cleansing was compared to the ceremonial act of purification.

The point is that God will purify Israel from her sins. There is the initial cleansing, but the process of sanctification is an ongoing cleansing represented by the sprinkling or washing with water; it is a process that removes sin and replaces it with righteousness.

Here the Eternal says that He 'will sprinkle clean water on you;' and we know that water baptism is by full immersion, therefore this is not a reference to water baptism; it is a reference to a spiritual cleansing through the Holy Spirit.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

God will give the converted nation a new heart and a new spirit. In place of a heart of stone He will give Israel a heart of flesh. With God's Spirit indwelling them, they will be motivated and compelled to obey His commands. In addition to that Satan will have been bound during that period of a thousand years, and they will not have that influence either.

God's restoration will not simply be an undoing of Israel's sin to bring her to a state of neutrality. Rather it will involve the positive implanting of a new nature in Israel's people that will account the righteousness of Christ to them. In Jeremiah 31:31-33, Jeremiah called this work of God the "New Covenant."

Here, in verse 27, we read another way of God saying that He will lead and inspire us to live by His Word by putting His Spirit within us, 'That He might cleanse the church with the washing of water by the word.'

In the New Testament, Jesus uses water to symbolize the Holy Spirit. You remember what Jesus says to the woman at the well:

**John 4:13-14** Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Jeremiah 17:13 tells us that the Eternal, who later became Jesus Christ, is the fountain, or source, of pure and living waters. John 7 elaborates on this same thing:

**John 7:37-39** On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

These verses show that the Bible uses water as a symbol of the Holy Spirit with regard to its power and cleansing properties.

Scripture often pictures the word of God as connected with birth and life. Psalm 119:50 says, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life."

The Word, the truth of God, had been the instrument in calling the psalmist from the death of sin, and bringing him forth to new life. It was by this 'word' that he had been made to feel alive with hope, so his major source of comfort was in that 'word.'

The water, the Word, and the Holy Spirit must be considered together, as one component. It is God's Holy Spirit that enables 'the word' to cleanse. God the Father opens our mind by His Spirit, giving us insight into and understanding of His Word and a consciousness and appreciation of God and His purpose. His Spirit gives us admiration for Jesus Christ, and for Christ's importance in the plan of salvation for mankind. His Spirit gives us a sense of guilt regarding sin at a much more intense and higher level than we had previous to our conversion.

Jesus Christ gave Himself so that we may be cleaned up! He had to die and we have to recognize His death, otherwise there would not be the forgiveness of sin. Christ did this so that we would repent, and so that we would be a suitable receptacle of God's Spirit. God will not put His Holy Spirit into a polluted receptacle. The fundamental meaning of holy is 'clean,' which suggests that it is something different; something unlike any thing we can imagine.

God's Holy Spirit cleanses us from the effects of our appalling past. It is not defiled and polluted; and it is unlike the human spirit we have by nature, which is the spirit of this

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world, and what we call human nature. The spirit of human nature is unclean, hateful and murderous, arrogant and wicked.

God's Spirit is totally different! God's Spirit is clean, pure, holy, righteous, kind, gentle, merciful, and submissive. Every good quality that we can think of exists within that Spirit. God will not defile it by putting it into a receptacle that is not suitable for it. So we have to be led to repentance, and there has to be a change.

Ignorance and blindness begin to be lifted by means of God's miraculous infusion of His Holy Spirit, not by water baptism. Water baptism represents our being completely washed of past sins. It is an ordinance symbolizing faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a burial, and a rising from a grave.

Prior to our baptism we were sinners, and in sin under the wrath of God. We have been delivered from that by our faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ, by what They have done for us. Baptism reminds us of that deliverance.

Although we are initially symbolically cleansed by water baptism, it is through the power of God's Holy Spirit that we are being cleansed on a continual basis by the washing of the word from the power and pollution of sin. It is a sort of 'gradual washing'—a process of cleansing.

In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul's main object is to show us how Christ is cleansing the church, and preparing her for Himself; and that He does this through the Holy Spirit. Clearly it is not accidental that when Christ was standing there in the Jordan at His own baptism, the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of and the shape of a dove.

So always in baptism we should be thinking of that aspect, of the coming of the Holy Spirit into us and upon us in order that He may baptize us into Christ and proceed with this work and process of sanctification. Remember Paul said, 'that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.'

And now we move on, from our consideration of this phrase 'the washing of water' and its actual terms. Of course, as far as this sermon is concerned, the really important term in Ephesians 5:26 is 'the Word.' 'That He might ... cleanse her with the washing of water by the word' or (if stated in a slightly different order) 'That He might cleanse her by the Word through the washing of water.'

The essential thing is this expression 'by the word,' which should be joined to the word 'cleanse.' There is a representation of it in baptism, but it is no more than a

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representation. The real work of sanctification is done by the word through the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is essentially important to cleansing. If something requires cleansing, 'the washing of water by the word' must be actively present. God does not work apart from His Word. The Bible is God's written Word, as the Father, and Jesus Christ the Spokesman, inspire and reveal it.

Many professing Christian churches have pushed Scripture to the back burner, into irrelevance, taking an ala carte spiritual meal from it, as if they have the authority to choose which doctrines to swallow and which to refuse. If the true church is to do a work for God, it must be established and built on God's Word rather than on humanly devised tradition. The same principle holds true in marriage and family, and that also must be built on God's Word.

Until God calls us, we are subject to the constant bombardments of words, the thinking and the ideas, the hopes and the dreams, and the ideals and the standards of this world. But when God calls us we are enabled by the Word of God. Every word of God is pure. If we want our thinking to be pure, then our minds must be fed with what will make our thinking pure. It must be fed on a daily basis.

We have the use of both the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Then we must put God's instructions into practice so that it becomes inscribed on our hearts. This is accomplished by making habits of that good behavior. God is longsuffering, and He gives most of us a long time to accomplish this. He gave the Israelites 40 years to internalize it by having it written on their hearts. He gives us a lot of time because the 'carnal mind is enmity against God' and is not turned around and cleansed over night.

The essential biblical teaching on holiness and sanctification is that it is something that is done through the Holy Spirit using the Word. And let me emphasize again that this is a process. It is a progressive cleansing until we are free from every spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. When we are free from every blemish we will be entirely holy and perfect.

The interesting thing in Hebrews 6, is that the caption in my Bible, for this section, says "the peril of not progressing." So if we are not overcoming sin, and we are not allowing God to sanctify us, and if we are not studying His Word, replacing those carnal thoughts with the Word of God, then we re in peril of not progressing.

**Hebrews 6:1** Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

There we are given a command to work with God in the process of sanctification and for husbands and wives to work with each other and our families.

**Hebrews 6:2** of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

So having initially learned and experienced: repentance, baptism, and the receipt of the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands, we are to 'move on' from these things, and to continue to grow and be cleansed.

**Hebrews 6:3-6** And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

This process of cleansing goes on throughout our Christian lives; and as we continue to grow spiritually there should be less and less of the pollution of sin in us, and we should become progressively more sanctified as this process goes on.

We are not merely enabled to resist the power of sin, we are being cleansed from the pollution of sin; and we are progressively being brought into a state in which we will be finally perfect. And this is done by means of the word—'by the word.' The great principle that we must lay hold of is that the operation of the Holy Spirit in us is generally in and through 'the word.' Some people go into apostasy by separating the Holy Spirit from the Word.

What did we just read in Hebrews 6? 'For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, IF they fall away, to renew them again to repentance.' Why? 'Since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.' That is a terrifying statement!

One extreme is that people put all their attention to the Holy Spirit and ignore the Word; the other extreme is that people put all their attention to the Word and ignore the Holy Spirit.

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Some people do not want to be taught, they do not want instruction from the Word; they live in the realm of feelings, moods, and experiences, and go off into ecstasies that often lead not only to the 'shipwreck of their faith' if they had any to begin with, but to gross immorality and excesses and failures.

Anything that we may think is the effect of the Holy Spirit must be tested by the Word. Enlightenment through and by the Holy Spirit will never do anything contradictory to the inspired written Word of God. So we are exhorted to 'prove the spirits,' to 'try the spirits,' to 'test the spirits.' Not all spirits are of God. And we must prove them. What provides such proof? It is the Word. So this work is done through the Spirit by means of the Word.

The apostle James shows that nearly all the understanding and strength that the Spirit provides in a believer is done by means of the word. Let us start with our regeneration.

**James 1:18, 21-24** Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. . . . Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Peter teaches the same thing:

**I Peter 1:23** having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

Also Paul has something to say about the same thing:

**I Thessalonians 2:13** For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

This 'word' brings us into eternal life into a superior quality of life; and it continues to

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work effectually in us. And Paul tells the Philippian church to 'work out their own salvation, with fear and trembling'; because it is God 'who works in us both to will and to do'.

How does God do this? He does it through His Word. So if we claim to be a Christian and we never study the Word of God, except on the Sabbath when we come and have it fed to us, then we are in serious shape, both in our marriage and as the potential bride of Christ. It is a very serious thing if we neglect this area.

The apostle John gives an account of what Jesus Christ was preaching one day, and we are told that when they heard His words many believed on Him. Then we read In John 8:

**John 8:31-32** Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Notice that we have to 'continue in His word,' and if we do so 'the truth (the word of God) will make us free'. Christ cleanses the church with the Holy Spirit using the 'word'. Remember what Paul said in Ephesians 5:26, "that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word," What is this 'word' that the Holy Spirit uses? We are to be sanctified by means of this 'word?' What is the teaching that leads to our progressive sanctification and deliverance from the power and the pollution of sin?

The answer is, of course, is that it is the whole Bible, the whole of the truth that you find in the Bible or in any one of these New Testament epistles.

The apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians in order that their sanctification might be promoted. They had believed the truth, as he reminds them in Ephesians 1. But he wants them to grow in grace, he wants them to develop spiritually, and he wants them to be rid of sin and its guilt, its power and its pollution. Paul wants them to see that the objective is for them to become perfect, entirely blameless and without spot; and to be brought to that point they must go through this process.

The whole of this epistle is about sanctification. This is 'the word.' It is not some little formula that we just simply apply, and then we have 'it.' We have to enter into all that we read and are commanded to do in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

In other words, 'the word' by which we are sanctified is the whole of the biblical

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teaching. It is, in particular, all the great doctrines that are taught throughout the Bible; and it is only as we realize this, that we see how we are sanctified and completed. This 'word' by which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us is first and foremost the Word about God. When teaching sanctification you do not start with man, you start with God!

The primary teaching about sanctification and holiness begins simply by teaching the doctrines concerning the Supreme Being, the nature and the character of God! You do not start with your problems and needs; you start with God. Take for example the statement about the call of Isaiah, as recorded in Isaiah 6:

**Isaiah 6:1-5** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

That is the way that the Bible teaches holiness and sanctification! It teaches the power and the glory and the attributes of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Why are we as we are? Why is there so much failure in our lives, and so much sin? The answer is that we just do not know God as we should; and that is corrected by prayer and Bible study!

To know someone you have to both listen and talk to him. We listen to God by reading and studying God's Word; and we both listen and talk to Him by praying to Him. Jesus sets the example in His intimate prayer with the Father.

**John 17:6-26** "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I

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come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified [and cleansed] by the truth [by Your word]. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word [i.e., the word give by Christ to the apostles to teach to us]; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

So, verse 23 it says, "That they may be made perfect in one." This is not only something that is helpful for members of the church, but this can be applied in marriage as well. A close relationship and being unified as one as husband and wife, and also parents and children, of course on a lesser plain, but nevertheless it is very important to be unified and one.

The trouble, even with Christians, is that we do not know God well enough. We have to forget about ourselves and the thing that is worrying us, the thing that gets us down. That is not really our trouble.

Our human nature is polluted, and if we get rid of that problem we will still have something else to fight, because God both gives us problems and allows us to have

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problems, so that we can build character, so that we can be perfected, so that we can be cleansed, and overcome our sins. God wants problem solvers in His Kingdom.

What we need is true knowledge of God—about: His glory, His perfection, His holiness, His omnipotence, His omniscience, and His omnipresence.

We must have the realization that wherever we are, and whatever we do, whatever we think, God is looking at us, and He is judging His church. We start with a true view of the sovereignty and the holiness of God, as the central, all-controlling doctrine.

We see it not only in Isaiah; Ezekiel shows us this same thing. He had this vision of God, and felt the same uncleanness, and fell down. Job, we find, had been talking a great deal about God, and criticizing; and then he sees, and he says:

**Job 42:5-6** "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Job was a righteous man, but still he had a long way to go through that process of sanctification before he could see God. Job started with himself and his problems, and he wanted to know how he could get rid of the problems, or have some special blessing. His whole initial approach was wrong.

The Word of God is the essential thing. It is all about God and His way of life; and it is a revelation of the being, character, and attributes of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Remember Phillip's question?

**John 14:8-10** Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

The Word of God reveals God the Father, and it cleanses the members of church.

**Ephesians 5:26** that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the

word,

The same word also reveals to us our state in sin. Sanctification is based on the truth concerning God's hatred of sin, and the punishment that God threatens for all sin. What next? The Ten Commandments! They establish the fact of sin, they pinpoint it, they expose it—so these things are part of this cleansing. We do not stop at the Ten Commandments, but they come in, in order to convince us of our need. The law is a practical expression of God's holiness. That is why we are commanded to post them in our homes.

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9** "Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you—'a land flowing with milk and honey.' Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The person who claims to be a Christian should certainly have the Ten Commandments posted in his home.

God's people are required to meditate on these commandments, to keep them in their hearts. This enables us to understand the law and to apply it correctly. Then the parents are in a position to impress them upon their children's hearts also.

The moral and biblical education of children is better accomplished when the parents, out of concern for their own lives, and even more so for their children's, make God and His Word the natural topic of conversation that might occur anywhere and anytime in the home. It does not mean that we have to talk about it constantly without any other

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subjects going on, but it means that God's Word and what He teaches should come up in our conversation, about world events, about politics, about health, and whatever else the subjects that we are talking about. However, there is an appropriate and commanded time for formal teaching of God's Word at such functions as church Sabbath services, and Bible studies, and other public situations.

Keep in mind as we are going through this, that this sermon is on marriage and family, and what I am doing here is I am showing you how to have a successful Christian marriage and family.

The Law is a teacher—to bring us to Christ; it is a revelation of God's holiness.

**Galatians 3:24-27** Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The Law is a way of showing us our need of it, and the continuing need of being cleansed. When we internalize the law, and have it memorized, it works in us constantly and it guides us, and it helps us to understand God's way of life.

Next, Paul told us at the beginning of his epistle to the Ephesians about God's gracious purpose of redemption, the covenant of redemption planned before the foundation of the world, the Father and the Son together planning man's deliverance.

**Ephesians 1:3-13** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according

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to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

That is how sanctification should be taught; we begin with the glory and holiness of God the Father. And next, we learn all about the life, teachings and work of Jesus Christ Himself, all that He has done, and all that He has endured. This is the 'word,' all the great doctrines; as well as, our baptism into Christ and our union with Him; then, this doctrine of the church. This is the word that promotes sanctification. And we have to go with all these doctrines up to the doctrine of the second coming and beyond.

**Ephesians 5:25-27** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

It is as we truly realize and understand His purpose for us when He will present the church to Himself as a glorious church, 'not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing,' that our sanctification is promoted.

Notice how the apostle John says the same thing:

**I John 3:1-3** Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The doctrine of the second coming leads to cleansing, to sanctification, and to purification. The word about which Paul is speaking in Ephesians 5:26, 'that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,' is the entire word of the inspired written Word of God—every doctrine, the entire Bible, along with the inspiration that comes through the Holy Spirit in understand it. God's Word provides a treasury of commands and admonitions for having a wonderful marriage. If the biblical principles

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are applied in our marriages and families all problems become manageable and can be solved.

And instead of looking at things that go wrong as problems, we realize that God has given us all the answers we need right here in His inspired written Word. So all of a sudden instead of problems we see unlimited solutions. Now remember, with the word, we also need God's Holy Spirit to understand and apply it. So a person in the world cannot just read the word and solve all of his problems, but he can solve some of them.

**Romans 8:28-31** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Here are just a few scriptures related to marriage:

**II Corinthians 6:14** Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

That advice right there is perfectly good for saving a person from marrying the wrong person, and from getting involved with someone in the world.

**Proverbs 12:4** An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.

**Proverbs 19:13** A foolish son is the ruin of his father, and the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping.

**Proverbs 31:11-12** The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. [So, husbands we are to trust our wives.]

**Proverbs 31:30** Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who

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fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

**I Corinthians 7:3** Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

**Ephesians 4:32** And be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

**Hebrews 13:4** Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

**Titus 2:3-5** Older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine—teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

Because all of this is true, what sort of people should we be? As Paul has explained it, we cannot be as we once were; we must work with God to separate ourselves. We must go on with our sanctification; we must go on with this process of cleansing, this process of conversion.

We must cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. We are to move on to perfection as Hebrews 6 admonishes us. We find in Ephesians 5:25-27, that the process of sanctification that is carried on by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, is done by, and in, and through 'the word.'

And no matter at what point you look at the word—the truth—it will humble you, and it will lead to your sanctification. But above all, start with God, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Christian husbands and wives work together and on behalf of each other to produce an atmosphere of peace in the family so that each other's spiritual sanctification and perfecting is not hindered.

What we need is not merely to worry about getting rid of those problems in our marriages and family; but to work with Christ in this process of sanctification, by humbly applying biblical principles as the solutions to those problems; and making our calling and election sure by making ourselves ready for the glory that awaits every saint.

It is as we look at the reality of who God is and what He is that we see the need of sanctification, and are shown the way that our sanctification can be achieved; and it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that it is done.

We are led to the word, it opens for us, and it is implanted into our minds and hearts and wills. Christ is being revealed to us, and so our sanctification, our cleansing proceeds from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, and from year to year. And as we will yet see, Christ will go on working with us until the work is completed, and we will be without any blemish in His holy presence. This is the work that Jesus Christ is continuing to do in His people, in God's church.

The focus is on God the Father and Jesus Christ, because husbands do not "sanctify" their wives or "wash" them of their sins; though a Christian husband should do all in his power to make family life peaceful for his wife, and conducive to growing in grace and knowledge, and meaningful and for his 'God-protected' and 'set apart' children. And the wife must do likewise! The husband's responsibility is greater because he has, in a sense, the greater position, he is responsible for his family and his wife especially, and so most of it falls on the husband, but a great deal falls on the wife as well, the mother in teaching the children.

We must do this so that Jesus Christ might 'sanctify and cleanse' the church 'with the washing of water by the word.'