

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON CXXV : THE WISE AND SPIRIT FILLED LIFE OF SUBMISSION / THE HAUSTAFEL (5:15-6:9)

Ephesians 5:25-33 — Paul to the CHURCHES — (part 2)

26a – that He might sanctify and cleanse her – ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθάριας [hina autēn hagiāsē katharisas] — **THE PURPOSE BEHIND CHRIST’S SELF-SACRIFICE —** *The death of Christ does not leave His people unchanged. Paul continues by giving the purpose for the Lord giving of Himself for we His people.* The next couple verses consist of three ‘hina’ clauses, or what is commonly referred to as ‘purpose clauses,’ each dependent upon παρέδωκεν [paredōken, the Greek word in v. 25, ‘He gave Himself for her’]:

- **In order that** *He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,* (v. 26)
- **In order that** *He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing,* (v. 27a,b)
- *but **in order that** she should be holy and without blemish.* (v. 27c)

Most of those I am studying consider the second ‘hina’ clause not as being parallel to the first (as shown above) but as its consequence. This would also make the presentation of the bride dependent on her ‘washing’ (v. 26), making v. 27 a further step in the argument and not a repetition of v. 26. [Best, 544f; Hoehner, 757] ***Note this metaphor is now looking at the ecclesia not as a wife but as a bride at the time of her wedding.***

‘HER’ IS SLIGHTLY EMPHATIC BY POSITION, PICKING UP ON v. 25 — Hoehner says the position of the personal pronoun (αὐτὴν, autēn, ‘her’) suggests the importance Christ places on the ecclesia. This is not to suggest there was some other body or object which Christ might have cleansed, but to pick up on the pronoun at the end of v. 25. ***“And the pronoun is slightly emphatic by position; as if to say, ‘It was in her interest that He did this, and so in the wife’s interest the husband should be ready for sacrifice.’”*** [Moule, 140]

SANCTIFY AND CLEANSE — Paul describes Christ’s death as having a double effect: it both *sanctifies* and *cleanses*. Not only are the two verbs difficult to distinguish in meaning but Bible students differ as to how these two words relate to each other; some view ‘cleansing’ as occurring before the ‘sanctifying,’ thus, ‘that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her...’ (ESV; see also RV, ASV, RSV, NASB, TEV, NRSV). Others see it as happening at the same time, thus, ‘that He might sanctify and cleanse her...’ (NKJV, see also AV, NEB, JB, NIV, NJB). ***T. K. Abbott may have captured it best by noting that ‘cleansing’ is chronologically contemporaneous with ‘sanctify’ but logically precedes it.*** [Abbott, 168] H. C. G. Moule says both refer to the same event [Moule, 140]; Clinton Arnold says the ‘cleansing’ is coincident with the action of sanctifying and as expressing means. [Arnold, 387] Harold Hoehner says the ‘cleansing’ conveys the means, manner, or cause of the sanctification, thus ***‘Christ sanctifies the ecclesia because (logically) he had cleansed (or by having cleansed) her by his sacrificial death.’ “Cleansing deals with the negative aspect, that of being cleansed from defilement of sin, whereas sanctification is the positive aspect, that of being set apart to God. They are two sides of the same coin.”*** [Hoehner, 752]

DOES THIS SPEAK OF OUR POSITION OR OUR PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION?

— Both of the words Paul uses is in the aorist tense which is typically used to refer to a single past event (*'hagiase'* or *'sanctify'* is an aorist subjunctive verb, *'katharisas'* or *'cleaning'* is an aorist participle). Speaking first of *'sanctify,' the aorist tense refers to the event that is the basis for the creation of the people of God: the death of Christ on the cross. Paul often describes our sanctification as a completed action (e.g., Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2). This is our 'positional' sanctification, or our position before God, and it is for this reason believers are called 'saints, those who are sanctified' (hagioi). So believers have been 'consecrated' or 'set apart' for God's use, a one-time action with permanent results* (note this can refer to objects as well as people, such as the articles *'set aside'* in the temple for the use of worship). *Historically this took place at the cross but became a reality for each believer the moment of their salvation. But most of those I studied believes this has an 'already – not yet' sense to Paul's statement, thus this probably also includes a present and future aspect as well, our daily sanctification here (Eph 4:11-16) and ultimately our final sanctification when we are glorified in heaven (Eph 1:10; Col 1:28).* The reason for their understanding this in a *'already – not yet'* aspect is because Paul continues his comments with *'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'* which is of course future. *Thus our sanctification, while completed positionally as mentioned above, is a process that is not completed until heaven* (Rom 6:19,22; 1 Thes 4:3-8; 5:23). [Arnold, 386f; Lincoln, 363f; et. al. believes this has a *'already – not yet'* aspect while Best, 542f and O'Brien, 421 disagrees]

CLEANSE — *The second word Paul uses, 'cleansed,' was widely used in the OT and Judaism to refer to the various forms of ritual purification prescribed by the law and carried out by the Jewish people. The entire sacrificial system was based on the need of the people for purification from various transgressions.* Beyond the purification from sin, purification rites were also done to lepers, Nazarites, the temple including the altar and the utensils, women after giving birth or following their menstrual cycle, and many other things. "In the first century, the Pharisees influenced the Jewish people to exercise scrupulous care in discerning clean and unclean foods, in eating with clean hands, and in engaging in various forms of ritual cleansing involving the use of water. Thus, ritual bathing pools (Hebrew: *miqwôt*) were common, as were cleaning installations near synagogues." [Arnold, 387] *With the inauguration of the new covenant, the focus changed from the outward cleansing to inward purity:*

'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.' (Matt 23:25 - 26).

26b with the washing of water by the word, – τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι [tō loutērō tou hudatos en hrēmati] — THE PROBLEMS OF UNDERSTANDING THIS AS BAPTISM

— We now enter a very controversial portion of Paul's comments. Admittedly many commentators, ancient and modern, understand this to refer to baptism. Although on the surface this may seem a plausible interpretation since baptism was one of the principal signs of the new covenant experienced by every believer, it is not the primary reference of the *'washing with water'* in this passage (see below) nor does it do justice to *'by the word.'* If Paul is speaking of baptism, how are we then to understand *'by the word'*?

- *'by the word'* is **the command of Jesus to baptize** (Matt 28:16-20); but this may be eliminated since this would have occurred prior to the baptism.
- *'by the word'* is **the candidate's own baptismal confession**, e.g., 'Jesus is Lord'; possible referenced by Peter in 1 Pet 3:21; but this may be eliminated because the emphasis in the passage is upon the action of God or Christ and not on that of the believer.
- *'by the word'* is **the gospel by which the baptismal candidate believed**; but this may be eliminated because this would have occurred prior to the baptism, along with the fact that whenever the Greek word used here for 'word' (ῥήμα, hrēma) used as the gospel, it is always qualified with God or Christ (Eph 6:17; Rom 10:17; Heb 6:5; 1 Pet 1:25)
- *'by the word'* is **a sermon or proclamation of the word at the baptismal ceremony**; but there is no NT evidence that at the time of baptism a sermon was preached (that does not mean there was not a sermon preached but it is an argument from silence)
- *'by the word'* are **the words of the baptismal formula spoken over the candidate at the moment of baptism**; although to get this sense, the phrase would mean something to the equivalent of 'the washing of water accompanied by the word'.

Reasons to not understand this to be a reference to baptism is as follows:

- The term used by Paul when he said *'by the word'* is not our usual term for 'word' (λόγος, logos) but ῥήματι (hrēmāti). While these terms may be used interchangeably, the term Paul used here typically has the sense of *'that which is said / spoken, word, saying'*. It is used 538 times in the LXX (470 times in the canonical books) and translated eight Hebrew words. It is used around 350 times to translate a Hebrew term meaning *'speech, word, message.'* ***Many times it refers to the command or the word given by God.*** In the NT the term occurs 68 times, 52 times in the Gospels and Acts, 8 times by Paul (Rom 10:8 bis, 17, 18; 2 Cor 12:4; 13:1; Eph 5:26; 6:17) and 8 times in the rest of the NT. ***The predominate idea is that of 'word, saying, message, statement.'*** ***With the exception of 2 Cor 13:1, Paul only uses it to refer to words that come from God or Christ. It is never used in connection with any rite such as baptism nor can advocates of Paul referring to baptism produce examples of this expression's use in connection with baptism in the writings of the early church.***
- It is better to join the phrase *'by the word'* with *'cleansing'* rather than with *'washing of water.'* This then would have the sense of *'cleansed through the word of the gospel.'* ***This is how this term is used elsewhere in Ephesians: as the preached word of the gospel which the Spirit uses as a sword (Eph 6:17; cf. Rom 10:8, 17; Heb 6:5; 1 Pet 1:25).*** As just mentioned, it is also consistent with every other usage by Paul (except 2 Cor 13:1) where it denotes words that come from God or Christ and refers to either the gospel or the use of the Word of God in the sanctification process of the believer.

'And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (ῥήμα, hrēma) of God' (Eph 6:17)

'But what does it say? "The word (ῥήμα, hrēma) is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word (ῥήμα, hrēma) of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto

righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’ (Rom 10:8-10)

‘So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (ῥήματος, hrēmatos) of God.’ (Rom 10:17)

‘and have tasted the good word (ῥήμα, hrēma) of God and the powers of the age to come’ (Heb 6:5)

‘because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word (ῥήμα, hrēma) of the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the word (ῥήμα, hrēma) which by the gospel was preached to you.’ (1 Pet 1:24,25)

- **“Furthermore, the rite of baptism does not cleanse one from sin. Even in the Qumran community the ritual washing was not considered as that which cleansed them (IQS 3.4-5, 8-10). Rather, it was God who wiped out their transgressions and justified them (IQS 11.2-3, 5, 10, 12-14; 1QHa 19:10-12 [11.10-12]).... It is probably best to see it as a metaphorical expression of redemption with the imagery of the bridal bath practiced in the first century.... In 1 Cor 6:11 it also mentions washing. There, unlike those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, believers were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God. Here, too, the washing has reference to the cleansing accomplished by Christ and not the ritual of baptism. In Titus 3:5 it refers to the washing of regeneration, indicating a cleansing that comes with salvation making us acceptable before a Holy God.”** [Hoehner, 753f]

- “Some have argued for a ‘both-and’ solution that combines a reference to the work of the Spirit (through the word) and water baptism, but Paul’s unequivocal emphasis in this passage is not on water baptism but on the fact that God has set the church apart for himself and purified this community of believers. While it is true that early believers may have immediately thought of water baptism when they heard the words ‘washing’ and ‘cleansing,’ baptism is clearly secondary in a close contextual reading of this passage (if it is present at all).” [Arnold, 389]

‘THE WASHING OF WATER’ DOES NOT REFER TO BAPTISM — Other than the difficulties with the phrase ‘by the word’ is the phrase immediately preceding, ‘the washing of water.’

- The fact that Paul speaks of ‘washing’ or ‘water’ do not necessarily point to baptism. The only time Paul speaks of baptism in the entire letter is at 4:5, where it is listed in a sevenfold confession but is not specially emphasized.

- The noun λουτρῶ (loutrō) refers to ‘bath, bathing place’ or ‘water for bathing, washing, bathing’ in classical Greek and Jewish literature. The word only occurs three times in the LXX (Cant 4:2; 6:6; Sir 34:25) with the meaning every time of ‘washing.’ Josephus speaks of the law of Moses regarding purification rites for the cured leper was to ‘*cleanse himself in a bath of water*’ (hudaton loutrois). The word appears in the NT twice (Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5). **While this word is never used in the NT to denote baptism, note that since Paul says ‘the washing in water’ this also excludes any thought of a ‘blood’ baptism or a Holy Spirit baptism.**

‘not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit’
(Titus 3:5)

PAUL’S COMMENTS COULD BE ROOTED IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL — Many of those I studied believed (to one degree or another) that Ezekiel was the possible (or probable) background for Paul’s comments here.

“The resultant cleansing and forgiveness of sins was anticipated by the prophet Ezekiel when he spoke of a future time of being sprinkled with clean water and having all of our impurities cleansed.... It is too simplistic, then, to interpret ‘the washing of water’ as a reference to baptism without seeing the richness of the new covenant promise of washing from Ezekiel and Paul’s interpretation of washing as ‘by the word.’... [That Paul is speaking of baptism] fails to recognize the ongoing process of sanctification and cleansing that takes place in the life of the believer by focusing only on the event of initiation. It also misses seeing the dynamic of God’s Word both in the initial sanctification as well as in the ongoing process.” [Arnold, 386ff]

“In depicting this union, [Paul] in vv 26,27 also draws on the prophetic picture of Yahweh’s marriage to Israel in Ezek 16:8-14 with its notions of cleansing, bathing with water, and the splendor of the bride (Canticles and Ps 45 are, however, not direct sources for Ephesians’ depiction).... Indeed, the language of ‘the washing with water’ is likely to have as a secondary connotation the notion of the bridal bath. This would reflect both Jewish marital customs with their prenuptial bath and the marital imagery of Ezek 16:8-14 which stands behind this passage. In Ezek 16:9 Yahweh, in entering his marriage covenant with Jerusalem, is said to have bathed her with water and washed off the blood from her.” [Lincoln, 363, 375]

“[T]he imagery from the Old Testament about God’s relationship to Israel stands behind this use of the marriage analogy. In particular, the background to Ephesians 5:26-27 is probably Ezekiel 16:1-14, which describes God as caring for, washing, marrying, and adorning his people with splendour.... Further, v. 26 is more likely to have been influenced by the marital imagery in Ezekiel 16:8-14 and the prenuptial bath in the Jewish marital customs than by baptismal considerations. Accordingly, the language of ‘the washing with water’ may well have a secondary reference to the bridal bath. When Yahweh entered his marriage covenant with Jerusalem, he bathed her with water, washed off the blood from her (v. 9), anointed her with oil, and clothed her with magnificent garments, making her so beautiful that she was fit to be a queen. Christ’s death on behalf of the church was to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water, and this is analogous to the bridal bath.” [O’Brien, 420, 422f]

“[N]ot only is this a metaphorical expression of redemption, but it also evokes the imagery of the bridal bath. This is significant since the present passage deals with the relationship of the husband to his wife. The prenuptial bath in Jewish marital customs reflected the imagery of God’s marriage to Israel related in Ezek 16.... The custom of prenuptial bathing seemed to be practiced also among the Greeks. Analogous to this bridal bath, the present verse relates that Christ’s death on behalf of the church was to cleanse her by the ‘*washing of the water.*’” [Hoehner, 754]

“Before the bride was presented to the bridegroom she received a cleansing bath and was then dressed in her bridal array. This provides part of the imagery in Yahweh’s account of his treatment of the foundling in Ezek 16:6-14, where he reminds her that, when she reached marriageable age, ‘I bathed you with water ... I clothed you also with embroidered cloth ... and I decked you with ornaments?’ So here, the purpose of Christ’s giving himself up for the church is said to be her sanctification and cleansing with water.” [Bruce, Eph, 387; F. F. Bruce notes the foundling in Ezek 16 is Jerusalem but bridal language is similarly used of Yahweh and Israel in Jer 2:2 and Hos 2:14,15; in Isa 62:4,5 it is the land rather than the people that is married (b^e ‘ûlāh) Yahweh]

CHRIST ASCRIBING TO HIMSELF DEITY — *“In the Old Testament the image of marriage was often used to depict the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people, Israel. Jesus took over this teaching and boldly referred to himself as the Bridegroom (Mark 2:18-20; cf. John 3:29). He presented ‘himself in the role of Yahweh in the divine marriage with the covenanted people.’”* [O’Brien, 420; see also Arnold, 383; Best, 541; Hoehner, 748ff; O’Brien, 419f; Lincoln, 374f]

BUILDING UPON EZEKIEL’S COMMENTS, PAUL IS PROBABLY SPEAKING OF THE SPIRITUAL CLEANSING BY THE WORD OF GOD — As above, ‘sanctify’ and ‘cleanse’ could have a ‘one-time aspect’ (our position, our justification in Christ) as well as an ‘on-going present-day aspect’ and a ‘future aspect,’ ‘the washing of water by the word’ could have a ‘one-time aspect’, and ‘on-going aspect’ and a ‘future aspect’ as well. It could refer to our justification, our salvation through the Word of God:

‘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’ (Eph 1:13; note the term for ‘word’ here is logos, not hrēma)

‘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.’ (1 Cor 6:11)

‘You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.’ (John 15:3)

But it could refer to our continual sanctification through hearing and submitting to the Word of God (and probably the emphasis of the phrase is upon this aspect):

‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.’ (John 17:17)

‘Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.’ (2 Cor 7:1)

‘who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.’ (Titus 2:14)

‘For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?’ (Heb 9:13, 14)

‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone

does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words (ῥήματα, hrēmata) abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.’ (John 15:4-8)

Some comments from others:

“The prophet Ezekiel spoke of a future time of cleansing from impurities that would be a hallmark feature of the new covenant:

‘I will sprinkle clean water ([hudor katharon]) on you, and you will be clean ([katharisthesesthe]); I will cleanse ([kathario]) you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.’ (Ezek 36:25 - 27)

This future cleansing with pure water was symbolic of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God’s new covenant people. The Spirit is God’s agent of cleansing, as Paul told the Corinthian believers:

‘you were washed ([apelousasthe]), you were sanctified, you were justified in the name the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor 6:11).

Similarly, Paul wrote to Titus,

‘he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth ([dia loutrou paliggenesias]) and renewal by the Holy Spirit’ (Titus 3:5).

Therefore, when Paul says that Christians are purified ‘through the washing of water,’ he is not referring to a literal form of ritual cleansing involving the use of water (as under the old covenant). Rather, he is referring to an inward form of cleansing that has been applied by the Holy Spirit (and will continue to be applied through the process of sanctification). This cleansing is truly effective for the forgiveness of sins. Paul further clarifies the nature of this cleansing process with the expression ‘by the word’ ([en hremati]). This prepositional phrase modifies the participle ([katharisas]) and is parallel to the preceding instrumental phrase, ‘through the washing of water’ ([to loutro tou hudatos]). ***‘By the word’ thus interprets and explains the meaning of the metaphorical expression, ‘cleansing ... through the washing of water.’ What formerly took place through ritual cleansing with water now happens through the proclamation of the Word of God.’*** ... Yet because sanctification and cleansing are not only onetime events but represent an ongoing process, the Word of God also has a significant role to play in the growth to maturity of every believer. Paul uses ‘the word’ in this sense when he speaks of the word of God ([hrema theou]) as ‘the sword of the Spirit’ (Eph 6:17). The ‘word of God’ is vital for believers in their lifelong battle against sin and the powers of darkness. The psalmist knew this well when he declared, ‘I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you’ (Ps 119:11).” [Arnold, 387f]