

“Washed by the Word”?

As we surrender our mind to the King and ask him to replace our truth with his truth, he does it. When we are prepared to let go of every ‘pet’ belief we have. He then has permission to reprogram us. Sometimes he imparts truth straight to our minds and other times he ‘drops’ it into our spirit. On other occasions he’ll bring a scripture or theology to our mind and we know we have to check it out in the Bible, without our Christian ‘spectacles’ on. This is part of his process to remove religion, legalism and false teaching from us so we align with his thinking.

This happened to me recently, like this...

It was a standard theology of evangelical Christianity that I was taught: We are “washed by the Word” (or something like that). The teaching I came under stipulated that the Bible is the ‘Word of God’ and by inference, I would be washed by this ‘Word of God’. This was one of the reasons I was instructed to read my Bible every day, compulsorily. Most Christians who were taught this theological idea may not be able to explain why bible-reading is so important for their personal washing.

As this is a tenet of a large section of Christendom, it is appropriate for me (and us) to check on its validity. To do that we need to ask a few questions:

1. What is the guiding scripture for this belief?
2. Is there any alternative theological meaning for the ‘proof’ scripture?
3. Is the belief correct from a scriptural perspective?
4. Does the use of the scripture in this way make spiritual sense?

(1) The scripture that is used and mostly quoted from rote learning is this:

Ephesians 5:25b-27 (KJV) – *...as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

It appears from this King James Version of verse 26 that the saints are washed by “the Word”. This is understood by evangelicals, of course, as ‘washed by the word of God’ – AKA the bible to them. Their acceptance of this theological premise seems to be correct on face value.

(2) If the verse in Ephesians was meant to convey what was taught to me, then every translation of it in the various versions of the NT should agree with the KJV. If this is not the case, then the translators of this 1611 version of the Bible chose to translate the Greek this way, but it’s not necessarily what the writer meant. Let’s see:

Ephesians 5:25-27 (ASV) – *...even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing¹ of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

Ephesians 5:25-27 (AMP) – *...just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; so that He might sanctify the church, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word [of God], so that [in turn] He might present the church to Himself in glorious splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy [set apart for God] and blameless.*

Ephesians 5:25-27 (CEV) – *...as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. He made the church holy by the power of his word, and he made it pure by washing it with water. Christ did this, so that he would have a glorious and holy church, without faults or spots or wrinkles or any other flaws.*

1 – Greek *laver*

Ephesians 5:25-27 (DRA²) – ...as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it: that he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life: that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (EHV³) – ...as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (GNV⁴) – ...even as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify it, and cleanse it by the washing of water through the word, that he might make it unto himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blame.

Just this short selection of translations reveals that a dogmatic belief cannot be made from verse 26 in the KJV. The Greek obviously is open to various interpretations, so claiming that it only has one meaning is blinkered and a form of indoctrination into error.

Now, looking at the Greek itself, it just says “**by word**”. There’s no preposition such as ‘the’ before *ῥήματι* (*rhema*, “word”) in the original Greek.

ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 5:25-27 (SBL Greek New Testament) – ...καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος **ἐν ῥήματι** [i.e. “**by word**”], ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἕνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν...

So, to categorically believe that the verse says “by the Word” is incorrect and should not be defended.

(3) If the church phrase “washed by the word” is taken in isolation from the rest of verse 26 and also from it’s context in the text, it must make biblical sense. If not, it’s just another case of justifying church dogma by twisting scripture or the selective use of it. Let’s check.

Verse 26 in simple English reads: “*He made the church holy by the power of his word, and he made it pure by washing it with water*”⁵

Now that makes biblical sense.

The Bible shows that Jesus died for all people born under the curse of The Fall by paying the death-price for their sin instead of them. Those who believe this fact with their heart and confess it as true are sanctified – i.e. made holy in God’s sight. This is a once-and-for-all-time act of sacrifice for everyone ever born. According to the Bible, converts become the saints of the Most High God, made holy by the spilling of the blood of a pure sinless man (Jesus of Nazareth). Our sanctification has occurred because God said so, and that fact can’t be changed.

Biblically speaking, there is no indication that we are consecrated by reading the Bible or in any other way.

Other biblical commentators see verse 26 in this way. For example:

- The Expanded Bible (EXB) has this note: “[the “washing” may be (1) baptism, (2) spiritual cleansing (Titus 3:5), or (3) an analogy drawn from the Jewish prenuptial bath (Ezekiel 16:8-14); the “word” may

2 – Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition

3 – Evangelical Heritage Version

4 – 1599 Geneva Bible

5 – Contemporary English Version (CEV)

be (1) the Gospel, (2) a baptismal formula, or (3) the confession of the one baptized]”.⁶

- The 1599 Geneva Bible (GNV) has this note about 'word': “Through the promise of free justification and sanctification in Christ, received by faith”. And about 'sanctify': “**Make it holy**”. And about the church’s blemishes: “The Church, as it is considered in itself, shall not be without wrinkle, before it come to the mark it shooteth at: for while it is in this life, it runneth in a race: but if it be considered **in Christ, it is clean and without wrinkle**”.

So, the members of the genuine *ekklesia* ('assembly') is already made holy by the work of the cross and the word of Father. No amount of bible study or scripture speaking can make her more holy in God’s sight than she already is. To add this into the meaning of verse 26 tantamounts to heresy (in the modern use of the term 'heresy').

(4) Everything we believe theologically must make spiritual sense. By that I mean: It must line up with the reality of the Kingdom and what Heaven and God know, and therefore operate under. This is what could be called ‘Heavenly truth’ or ‘spiritual truth’. This truth is totally independent of what Christians believe from the Bible or the pulpit. It’s the way things are in Heaven, and therefore, in the Kingdom. To put a more blunt point on it, if anything is out of alignment with God’s knowledge, then it is false (or error or a lie).

It’s important, therefore, that we believe what is the truth in Heaven. Everything we believe must be filtered to ensure that our knowledge is God’s knowledge. As a son, to believe anything other than what he believes is foolishness or presumption – even if it’s based on faith.

Because there are many ways to interpret almost every verse in the NT, we cannot be dogmatic about any one version, or for that matter, any word, verse or phrase. On top of that, we must not approve the teachings of people (“teachings of men”). Jesus said that his Spirit is the teacher of truth, so this is where our individual knowledge must come from. He teaches us directly and he teaches us from any source he wishes, provided we know his voice when he’s teaching us. It’s the responsibility of every son to align with the King – we must believe what he believes and nothing else when it comes to spiritual understanding.

In the case of being “washed by the word”, we cannot accept that anything other than that the blood of the sacrificed Lamb can sanctify us. If God knows that the blood was enough, then it is. He has told us numerous times this decade through his Spirit that he sees us as perfect, even though we operate corruptly in our fallen bodies. It is illogical then to believe that reading the Bible or speaking out verses does anything to enhance our sanctification. It can’t – because God didn’t set up our consecration that way.

There’s also the confusion of mixing verse 26 with Jesus’ statements⁷ about living water. The theology from this mix states that the living water is the “word of God” – AKA the Bible. It follows from this that we are “washed by the water of the word of God” when we read the Bible. It is recommended, therefore, that we read the Bible every day so we get our “water” supply. Those of us who have discovered that the Living Water is a special supply that we ‘drink’ from the spirit realm through our spirit know that this idea is erroneous. Living Water is spiritual refreshment coming from the Lord’s presence and his perfect love.

REMEMBER: It was prophesied that what God speaks is more important to him than who he is.⁸

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6 – www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%205:25-27&version=EXB

7 – John 4:10-11

8 – Psalm 138:2