

From Pilgrims To Pillars (Part One)

Cleansing and Editing Metaphors

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We are going to turn to a number of related scriptures upon which I plan to weave together a theme. The scriptures will come from the Lockman Foundation's Amplified Bible. Here in Ecclesiastes 3, we read that God set eternity in the heart of man.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful *and* appropriate in its time. He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun can satisfy, except God]—yet man cannot find out (comprehend, grasp) what God has done (His overall plan) from the beginning to the end.

Isaiah 40:6-8 All humanity is [as frail as] grass, and all that makes it attractive [its charm, its loveliness] is [momentary] like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; most certainly [all] the people are [like] grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.

Peter quoted this verse in his epistle in I Peter 1:24-25. Let us turn to Psalm 103.

Psalm 103:13-16 Just as a father loves his children, so the Lord loves those who fear *and* worship Him [with awe-filled respect and deepest reverence]. For He knows our [mortal] frame; He remembers that we are [merely] dust. As for man, his days are like grass; like a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it and it is no more, and its place knows it no longer.

Now go back a few chapters to the poignant Psalm 90, written by Moses.

Psalm 90:9-12 For all our days pass away in Your wrath; We have finished our years like a whispered sigh. The days of our life are seventy years—or even, if because of strength, eighty years; yet their pride [in additional years] is only labor and sorrow [Moses, to be sure lived to 120 robust years, with the full use of his faculties. My father lived 93 years and five months, with an exceedingly sharp mind, but near the end of his life, tethered to an oxygen

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tank and severely mobility challenged], for it is soon gone and we fly away. [Our schematic diagrams circuit boards loaded with data return to God Almighty.] So teach us to number our days, that we may cultivate *and* bring to You a heart of wisdom.

With each additional year that goes by in my life, I become have become more attuned to the frailty or temporariness of my own flesh, the necessity to count my days, and the desperate need to yield to the rigorous sanctification process which is necessary to convert the precious treasure—our calling, which is temporarily stored in fragile earthen jars into something more permanent, something more glorious, and something eternal.

The pitifully short 70, 80, 90, or 100 year interval of our lives, especially the highly important, roller-caster segment between our calling until our resurrection, glorification, and entry into the Family of God, we term sanctification—a process in which we begin in a frail, temporary state, but thankfully advance to a glorious, permanent eternal state.

The apostle Paul once described the sanctification process as enduring a tentative, temporal process of living in a tent to a more permanent process of living in a building. Having previously lived in five separate mobile homes in my life, I think I understand and appreciate the grounds of comparison.

Back on September 26, 2013, I gave a sermonette at the Feast titled “Classical and Modern Metaphors of the Resurrection,” in which I suggested that the process of resurrection and glorification consists of transferring data from impermanent corruptible containers. For this Feast season, I have decided to start on my first ever two-part series (or perhaps one could say three part—since I’m continuing a major theme drawn from that 2013 message).

This particular message is describing our extremely short, approximately 70-year to perhaps 100-year journey from our calling to our adoption into the Family of God. In these two messages, I plan to shed light on the sanctification process using both biblical, or classical, metaphors and modern or technological, metaphors from the print media, audio and video technology, drawing some insights from film restoration.

The two major ways God Almighty has and will bring judgment on His creation suggests His two-part plan of sanctification—firstly cleansing, washing away, removing dross and imperfections, and secondly enhancing by spiritual high definition through a refiner’s fire or perhaps digitalizing with high definition. Whether we focus on the potter-clay analogy, the refining furnace, washing with hyssop, audio-editing, video-editing, or book editing,

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cleansing, washing, removing dross, slag, impurities, and imperfections is always the first part of the process.

In the second phase of sanctification, which I will take up on October 21, 2016, the focus will switch to the intense, fiery refining process, augmenting our puny attempts with powerful godly high definition.

Sanctification can be visualized in the two separate means that God initially destroyed the effects of sin in the Great Flood in Genesis 8 and in the great holocaust described in II Peter 3:10 when the [material] elements will be destroyed with intense heat and the earth and the works that are on it will be burned up. What happens to the macro world is exactly what must go on in the micro, as the evil, carnal part of our nature is mortified or destroyed and displaced by spirit exhibiting God's character.

Whether we envision sanctification as transforming dirt or clay into fine ceramic artifacts, chunks of coal into diamonds, raw ore into pure gold or silver, fleshly carnal beings into spiritual beings with inherent godly character, the process requires a cleansing and ridding of imperfections followed by an intense period of refining after which a masterwork is ready for the Creator.

Washing, as a metaphor of sanctification, and baptism as a symbol of death in a watery grave, may have justified us from prior sins, but it did not remove the proclivity to sin. We are aware, being part of Noah's offspring, that the washing away of the evil pre-Flood generation did not eliminate sin from the world, a time recorded in Genesis 6:5 in which every imagination or intent of the heart were only evil continually.

The world today is every bit as horrific as in Noah's time. If you do not believe me, just check out the comment sections on the social media. As God's called-out ones, we are part and parcel of this evil culture, needing our hearts and minds scoured from the grimy filth that has accumulated within our absorptive nervous systems.

David Grabbe, in the last 2½ minutes of his April 15, 2006 sermonette "Has Your Heart Been Healed, Part 2," related a story how a grandfather in Kentucky taught his grandson the meaning of "washing of water with the word" by challenging him to take a sooty old wicker basket to the creek to fetch him some water. After the third or fourth failed attempt because of the water seeping out, the boy said, "Paw paw, we need a bucket, not a basket." The grandfather said, "Look at the wicker basket; it was formerly crusted with coal dust, now it is clean again."

So, it is with the symbolism of our baptism and the annual foot-washing ritual. Our

hearts require a further procedure before we are free from sins—similar to the regular carwash we give our vehicles, only to have the crows relieve themselves on it 10 minutes later. Our carnal nature wants to ghoulishly come out of the watery grave and reclaim us.

In their article, “Being Purified as Gold,” Andrew Hessong and Tim Thompson suggest that in the initial stage of the gold refining, the raw ore, which symbolizes us in our carnal state, “is crushed and pounded into powder, and then must go through frequent washings and cleansings. During these washings, the unwanted, non-metallic elements are, to a large extent, left behind.”

Ananias, in Acts 22:16, directed the newly-called Saul to “Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name [for salvation].” Peter had earlier said to the crowd on the first Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2:38, “Repent [change your old way of thinking, turn from your sinful ways, accept and follow Jesus as the Messiah] and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The washing and cleansing must continue to take place on a daily basis throughout our conversion, not only annually as we wash one another’s feet on the Passover. But as we come before Almighty God on our knees on a daily basis, as the apostle John instructs us in his epistle I John 1:9, “If we [freely] admit that we have sinned *and* confess our sins, He is faithful and just [true to His own nature and promises], and will forgive our sins and cleanse us *continually* from all unrighteousness [our wrongdoing, everything not in conformity with His will and purpose].”

Paul adds an additional insight to this metaphor in Ephesians 5:26-27, as he declares: “so that He [Jesus Christ] 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.”

David, in his heartfelt psalm of repentance (Psalm 51) after he had committed adultery and murder, uses the imagery of washing and cleansing, as he pleads to God: “Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness *and* guilt, and cleanse me from my sin,” and in verse 6, “Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.” These petitions bring to mind the Lord’s promise in Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool.”

David realized that his sins had become bloodstained with crimson with the blood of Uriah, wanting desperately to have that filthy dross removed from his character. David exhibited a crushed, repentant attitude in his prayer before God, asking to have that dross and ugly stain of sin totally washed out of him. I would imagine that Psalm 51, because it resonates with so many people's life experiences, is perhaps one of the most oft-repeated, oft-prayed psalms in the entire Bible.

The cleansing aspect of sanctification could well be applied to the role of a magazine or book editor as well as an editor or director of audio or visual media—such as radio, television, or motion pictures. Because I live 35 miles from Hollywood and 9 miles from a working movie studio, I have become increasingly aware of media analogies to sanctification.

For many years, I taught the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* in American Literature, the work incidentally from which Herbert W Armstrong derived the title, *The Plain Truth* (the magazine of our previous fellowship). He was also inspired to write his own autobiography following Franklin's example. When Benjamin Franklin was once asked whether he would like the opportunity to live his life over a second time, he replied, that "Were it offered to my choice, I should have no objection to a repetition of the same life from its beginning, only asking the advantages authors have in a second edition to correct some faults of the first. So I might, besides correcting the faults, change some sinister accidents and events of it for others more favorable."

As he unfolded the events of his life, he used an editor's term called "errata" to describe foolish or even disastrous events in his life that left him with a sense of shame. Later in his life, he would devote a section of the narrative to how he had emended this mistake. One of the perennial short answer questions I gave my American Literature students was to identify two of Franklin's errata (mistakes) which he later corrected.

I have not yet written an autobiography, but have kept a detailed journal for 46 years, longer than most of my students have been alive. Virtually all my ideas for articles, sermons, lectures, and projects have had their origin in these little red books. (Last Tuesday, out of curiosity, I stacked these volumes up vertically to measure them; the stack came to 52 inches. If I had kept it from infancy, using these uniform volumes, the stack would be 72 inches, one inch for every year.)

But the journals started in 1970, four years after my baptism. I was recovering from being struck as a pedestrian by a drunk driver in Superior, Wisconsin. I reflected I had come so close to losing my life that I wanted to count and evaluate and savor the days that I had left by systematically recounting my experiences.

In the pages of these volumes, I have recorded accomplishments, failures, fears, episodes of intense happiness, episodes of intense grief, rage, frustrations, and occasional insights. One of the poignant things I have learned about keeping a journal is that experience cannot be equated with wisdom unless it is properly evaluated—and without the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, human wisdom cannot reliably evaluate experience. No one has ever graduated from the school of hard knocks.

I have learned the reality of Proverbs 16:9 which reads, "A man's mind plans his way [as he journeys through life], but the Lord directs his steps *and* establishes them. Episodes that I considered a curse 42 years ago turned out to be a blessing, and episodes I may have considered a blessing 33 years ago turned out to be a painful mistake. The journals have helped me to visualize the reality of Romans 8:28, that "God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His plan *and* purpose."

The things we may have hopelessly botched God can put to good use if we turn to Him and allow Him to take control of our lives as we covenanted to do when we were called.

We need to begin viewing God Almighty as the editor-in chief, and Jesus Christ as the copy editor of our individual autobiographies. Over the years I have become increasingly grateful for the work of competent editors—both Richard Ritenbaugh [sometimes known as 'slash'] and Dixon Cartwright have the skill to take a mediocre manuscript and turn it into a work of art, figuratively transforming a sow's ear into a silk purse or base metal into gold.

Each week, as I prepare the abstracts for the web, my wife Julie and my 'brother' Charles Whitaker serve as copy editors to guarantee quality control of the end product. Charles is truly an English teacher's teacher, continually keeping me on my toes. He will write, "David, this phrase is inelegant." Or "This expression is not idiomatic," or "You should use the active voice here," or "This word is redundant." If you could see the before and after drafts, you would appreciate the special skill of the copy editor. Remember that in the sanctification process, God is the copy editor of our life manuscripts.

Another editor who I have come to appreciate is the sound technician, Ted Bowling, who systematically excises out my pesky coughs. Ted can also edit out gaffes and embarrassing mis-statements with equal finesse. After one of my last messages, which was plagued by a high volume of pesky coughs, I listened to the mp3 file Ted had placed on the web. To my amazement, not one cough could be heard on the recording. I thanked Ted for his diligence, suggesting this could provide a powerful metaphor for

forgiveness of sin (the first part of the sanctification process) for an article or sermon topic.

In addition to removing coughs and gaffes, audio-restoration software is now also able to remove hiss, impulse noise, crackle, wow and flutter, background noise, and hum from sound from sound recordings.

When 33 ½ records or 35 millimeter films are being prepared to be transferred to a digitized format, they are washed in water or a cleaning solution. When they are transferred to computerized digital files, they can then be subject to electronic washing, such as de-clickers, de-cracklers, de-hissers, and dialogue noise suppressors, removing buzzes and hums.

One scripture that always causes me to break out in a cold sweat is Matthew 12:36: “But I tell you, on the day of judgment people will have to give an accounting for every careless *or* useless word they speak.” In my raw life-script, my words have not been few, nor have they been exactly temperate or without coarseness, even though I have been continually aware of Paul’s injunction in Colossians 3:8 to rid ourselves [completely] of all these things: anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene (abusive, filthy, vulgar) language from your mouth. Living in today’s culture, with the F-bomb, the S-bombs exploding all over social media, it is difficult to filter these out of the nervous system.

Our electronic high-tech industry has provided software—such as Rumble Fish and TV Guardian which effectively edits out trash talk, profanity, and filthy talk. TV Guardian reads the closed captions ahead of the audio, and knows what is going to be said, before it is said. Each word is checked against a dictionary of more than 150 offensive words and phrases. When a foul word or phrase is detected, TV Guardian automatically mutes the offensive language. One caution was that since it automatically blocks religious words used blasphemously, the religious filter should be turned off when watching Bible movies. The filter resembles chemotherapy in this respect that it kills both good and bad cells.

The filter of God’s Holy Spirit in Romans 8: 26-27 is a superior editor to Rumble Fish and TV Guardian because it does not destroy the good along with the bad. How many times in our daily conversation with our heavenly Father have our prayers been halting, rambling, disjointed, and repetitious—sometimes almost like we were sending spiritual junk mail to Almighty God.

Romans 8:26-27 sounds like an editing process is taking place, turning straw into gold:

In the same way the Spirit [comes to us and] helps us in our weakness. We do not know what prayer to offer *or* how to offer it as we should, but the Spirit Himself [knows our need and at the right time] intercedes on our behalf with sighs *and* groanings too deep for words. And He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes [before God] on behalf of God's people in accordance with God's will.

Our divine Copy Editor has filtered out all the dross and slag, washing and cleaning our communication so it can be a sweet rarified incense to our heavenly Father,

Over the years, I have been impressed with the work of electronic editors, directors, and producers. For 15 years, hosting the World Classics program, I read a script into the microphone, messing it up three or four times. I cannot ever recall getting it right the first time. The engineer, after the gaffe or mistake, would tell me to continue, and he would electronically splice it later. In the 70s the same task was performed by cutting a strip of Mylar tape, the same technique the film industry uses after the director says "cut, take 2."

The late John Halford, years ago, when people would request to see a taping of the World Tomorrow television program, would ask them, "Do you like sausage?" If they would reply yes, which was usually, he said, "Don't ask to see a taping of the World Tomorrow television program then."

Proverbs 16:9 says: A man's mind plans his way [as he journeys through life], but the Lord directs his steps *and* establishes them." Consider the verb in the second line: "directs"—the LOORD is the director of the movie made from our lifetime autobiography. Each day of our life can be considered a separate frame in a 70, 80, 90, 120-year motion picture, in which there will be continuous calls to "cut, take 2, 3, 4." God the Father serves as producer and Jesus Christ serves as the director, calling for another cut and retake.

Alfred Hitchcock (an unlikely Christ figure) but nevertheless an exemplary role model as a motion picture producer, has an uncanny ability to visualize every frame of his production from the beginning to the end, such as we see in his masterpieces *Spellbound*, *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*. Hitchcock's favorite method of sequencing scenes was to use a large sketch pad with a graphite pencil, in which he sketched the sequential camera angles.

Like carbon-based graphite pencils which make temporary sketches, we are also

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carbon based, serving as our Creator's preliminary, temporary sketches until He decides on a more permanent medium for us. Thankfully, carbon-based graphite pencils also contain erasers, allowing for second, third, and fourth chances.

Alfred Hitchcock directed 66 feature length films, each feature springing from approximately 1000 frames apiece, deriving from Hitchcock's copious sketches, which are currently bound together in large archived notebooks. There is a fascinating website called, "1000 frames of Hitchcock" in which each of his films has been reduced to 1000 still frames, based his sketched-out notebooks. Other websites contain compilations of the artistic sketch and the movie frame side by side.

We know from Ephesians 1:4 that God began His sketchpad on each of us before the foundation of the world, and He will continue, as Paul tells us in Philippians 1:6, to direct the project, perfecting and completing it until the day of Christ Jesus [the time of His return].

Recently I saw a taped interview Alfred Hitchcock gave to Public Television in which he describes having to calm a hysterical Ingrid Bergman who became overwhelmed thinking she was messing everything up in one of the scenes from *Spellbound*. Hitchcock calmly assured her, "Ingrid, this is only a movie."

Similarly, all of us, still temporary as the graphite sketches before the camera shoot need to look beyond the temporary state in which we find ourselves to the permanence of God's Family.

Let us now conclude in Romans 8.

Romans 8:20-23 For the creation was subjected to frustration *and* futility, not willingly [because of some intentional fault on its part], but by the will of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will also be freed from its bondage to decay [and gain entrance] into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been moaning together as in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only this, but we too, who have the first fruits of the Spirit [a joyful indication of the blessings to come], even we groan inwardly, as we wait eagerly for [the sign of] our adoption as sons—the redemption *and* transformation of our body [at the resurrection].

Our calling gives us hope that God is continually shaping us in our temporariness an

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end-product which will endure throughout eternity.