

The Saints

By

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To modern ears the term saint refers to someone who has died and “gone to heaven,” or to someone with unworldly perfection. One may hear a person say, “I’m a Christian, but I’m no saint.” Giving certain famous people the title of Saint, as Saint Augustine, Saint Andrew, etc., enhances this false conception. In some Bibles the word is used as a special title, as: “The Gospel according to Saint Matthew” or Saint Luke,” etc.

The word does have special significance, but not in the way it is commonly used in the world. The apostle Paul applied the term to ALL Christians, and addressed most of his letters to the churches to “the saints.” The word is from the Greek *hagois*, from which we also derive the word “holy.” It is used in regard to things and places, as well as people, and applies to all that is set apart or separated for God’s use. *Hagios* is the root of the word *hagiosmos*, which is usually translated “sanctified.”

If you are part of the ekklesia, the “called out assembly” that we call the church, then you are among the sanctified and you are a saint. We can learn what this means from some of the examples in the Old Testament, where certain things were sanctified and made holy. The Tabernacle, the priests, the Ark of the Covenant, the shew bread and all the vessels of the Tabernacle and the Temple were sanctified and made “holy to the Lord.” All these things were set apart for a purpose different from the ordinary. They were for special use in God’s service.

When instructions for the priesthood were given, it is written, “They shall be *holy* to their God” (Lev. 21:6). They had a special function and were to be different from other men. It was said of the tithes of produce that it was “*holy* to the Lord” (Lev. 27:30-32) because its purpose and use was different from the rest of the produce. The nation of Israel was called “a *holy* nation” (Ex. 19:6) because they had a special place in the purpose of God.

You get the idea. Christians must be *hagios*, *holy* ones, *saints*, because Christians are different and have a special purpose.

The first thing that sets a Christian apart is in one’s relationship to God through Christ. Scriptures attests that we are sanctified (made saints) by the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:29, 13:12). This refers to Christ’s death. “All we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3). From that point on, Paul writes, we are “alive unto God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11).

To be a saint is to be in Christ. Paul uses the phrase *in Christ Jesus* 48 times, *in Christ* 34 times, and *in the Lord* 50 times. Being in Christ is not the same as attending a worship service. It is not merely being with the group, or a “member” of a certain denomination. It means living in Christ, so that Christ is the center and focus of life. Marvin R. Vincent says that when Paul spoke of the Christian being in Christ, he meant that the Christian lives in Christ as a bird in the air, a fish in the water, or the roots of a tree in the soil. It

means that all that is done is in relation to Him, not just on Sunday, but every day. If one is a saint he is a servant of Christ everywhere, all the time, under all circumstances.

The Christian has a different relationship with the world. He is set apart to serve God. The Apostle Paul often called himself a slave of God. He had been purchased by the death of Jesus, and had only one ambition, to be his faithful slave. He had been a highly educated Pharisee, with a promising future as a great leader among the Jews, but when he became a Christian he counted all his former privileges and attainments as filthy garbage, and readily gave them up in order to follow Christ. (Phil. 3:8)

The aim of many a modern person is to gratify his or her own selfish desires, to see how much gusto one can get out of life. The aim of Jesus was to serve God and to please Him, even to renouncing himself and his own life in the process. So he announced that if any would follow him, that is, be a Christian, he is to deny self and take up his own cross – whatever self-renunciation is necessary – and follow Him. The modern church downplays all this in order to appeal to the worldly-minded. Churches vie with each other to see who can offer the program that is most attractive to those who love the world and what it offers.

A saint is one set apart for a special purpose. We are told to flee foolish and hurtful lust in order to “follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Time. 6:11). We are separated from unrighteousness in order to present ourselves “unto God, as alive from the dead,” in order to become instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom. 6:13).

Being set apart as a saint means a change in one’s attitude, conduct, language, disposition and entire lifestyle. This includes sexual behavior and our attitude toward it. Paul wrote, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). Paul is writing of proper sexual behavior, and tells the saints that they were not to have “lustful passion” for God “has not called us for the purpose of impurity but for sanctification” (1Thess. 4:5, 7). This clearly puts homosexuality in opposition to the saint’s behavior, and demonstrates what it means to be set apart as different. Church leaders who compromise this issue and seek to make homosexuality acceptable to their churches are denying the very essence of sanctification “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Does this mean that a saint is one who lives perfectly, and never commits a sin? The answer is no, as we shall see. I am aware that certain denominations have a doctrine that sanctification is a “second work of grace,” something that happens to the Christian some time after the initial conversion and forgiveness of sins. Many believe that after that time a person will live above sin.

That is not the case. Becoming a Christian and being set apart (sanctified) are one and the same thing. Paul said that those in the Corinthian church were sanctified (1 Cor. 1:2, 6:12), but, as anyone who has read the 1 Corinthian letter knows, that church was plagued with sin. Paul called upon them to repent, which they did (2 Cor. 7:8-11).

Being a saint does not mean one is perfect. The apostle Paul, near the end of his career, wrote that he had not attained perfection, but that he pressed on toward the goal (Phil. 3:8-9). He was writing to saints when he said, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). In writing to Christians, John said, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

Some think that if a person can overcome his faults and live as a true Christian, he will be loved and respected by everyone. On the contrary, being set apart to serve God invites the world's hostility, just as Jesus told the apostles: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19). As William Barclay pointed out, "The world acutely dislikes people whose lives are a condemnation of it. It is in fact dangerous to be good." This is becoming more evident as society increasingly objects to the absolute moral standards presented by Christ, and as those who promote a New World Order insist on everyone endorsing a "one religion fits all" concept.

This is the challenge of Jesus, that we have the faith and the courage to be different. It is called the "narrow way" and may sometimes be difficult as well as dangerous. But unless one is willing to run that risk, he cannot be one of God's saints.

All this might seem to some to be a negative mind-set because it repudiates so much that the world considers necessary to pleasure and success. But the opposite is true. To be sanctified is to be separated from the anxiety, frustration, false hopes, and emptiness of the world and to be blessed with the peace, comfort, joy, love and true hope in Christ.

The greatest difference that sanctification makes is in one's destiny. In Christ we are set apart for a certain glorious destiny. While all around us people are striving for that which will soon perish and are trying to find happiness in a life that will ultimately end in the final consummation of all things, the saints are enjoying the fellowship with God and His son Jesus, and joyfully looking forward to receiving "the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32), an inheritance which includes life forever with the Father and the Son in a glorious world made new.

I hope you can sing with me:

Lord, I hope to be in that number, when the saints go marching in.

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