
BIBLE STUDIES - WHO ARE YOU?

SERIES: NAMES GOD USES FOR CHRISTIANS
“A good name is to be more desired than great wealth.” (Prov. 22:1)

Lesson #7 “SAINT”

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.” (Ephesians 2:19)

An article that appeared in England’s Daily Telegraph newspaper, gave the results of a survey conducted by a Roman Catholic Priest, which revealed that, of the over 10,000 registered saints in the Catholic Church, over 1,000 were Popes. Also, there is a saint for each day of the year.

This widespread and misuse of the word “saint” over the centuries has resulted in a misunderstanding and misapplication of the word “saint”. So, it is always the better part of wisdom to let the Bible define biblical terms that it uses. Who then, according to the Bible, is a “saint”?

WHO IS A SAINT?

The word “saint” or “saints” is found in the English Bible approximately 100 times. Repeatedly God describes His people as “saints”. We are satisfied to call ourselves “believers” but are hesitant to address each other as “saint”. When did you ever hear someone introduce themselves as Saint Joe or Saint Marilyn or Saint Danny or Saint Irene?

Unfortunately, because of the misuse of the word “saint” most people think that a saint is some kind of spiritual superstar. So, let us take a good look at the name “saint” that God gives His children and make certain that we know who is a saint according to God’s Word.

1. We Begin With The Definition.

The word translated “saint” is the Greek word “hagios.” It means “holy, set apart for God’s use.” Let us see how this word is used in the Bible. Not only is the word “holy” used of persons but certain inanimate objects are also designated as “holy” in scripture:

- Mountains, like Sinai and Zion, etc. are called "holy mountains." (Psalm 48:1)
- The oil that was used in anointing was called "holy oil." (Numbers 35:25)
- The temple was called "the holy temple." (Psalm 5:7; 11:4 etc)
- Its rooms were called "the holy place" and "the most holy place," and its items of furniture were called holy. (Exodus 26:33)
- Sometimes the ground was called "holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)
- The city of Jerusalem was called a "holy city." (Isaiah 52:1)
- Certain days were said to be "holy days." (Nehemiah 10:31)

A saint then, in the eyes of God, is that person who has been declared holy by God, set apart for God’s use and purpose while on the earth. The nation of Israel was called “holy”: “You are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself.....” (Deut.7:6; 14:2) Likewise, God’s people today are called “holy.”

2. We Continue With A Distinction.

There are those persons who have been classified as saints by human beings and there are those who have been declared to be saints by God, the divine Being. Let us look at the distinctions between the two.

a. Man-Made Saints.

There is much misunderstanding about the term “saint”. There are those who understand the term to mean a super Christian who has been elevated to the status of “saint” by the edict of church leaders after death.

The common idea is that a saint is someone for whom special days, hospitals and churches are named - people who have made significant contributions to our world, like St. Augustine, St. Patrick, St. Nicholas or St. (Mother) Theresa of Calcutta, etc.

There are many who believe that saints are those who are canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. The process by which a good Roman Catholic constituent becomes a saint is called “canonization.” After a person dies, the deceased person’s life is reviewed carefully to see whether they qualify for sainthood. If they have lived a good life in service to the church and were responsible for working at least two miracles, then that person is qualified to be made a saint. Whether or not they are actually canonized or not is determined by the church officials with the Pope making the final determination.

b. God-Made Saints.

According to the Bible, a saint is not someone who, by his or her own merit and efforts, has achieved greatness. Rather, a saint is someone whom God has declared to be a saint, totally apart from human accomplishments. Here is God’s Word regarding the matter:

Rom. 1:7 “To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice the words, “called to be saints” – that is, “called to be holy”. The word “saints” here is the Greek word “hagios” which means holy. Adam Clark, the renowned commentary writer, translates Rom 1:7 as follows: “to all that be in Rome, constituted saints....”

I Cor. 1:2 Paul addressed the Corinthian letter to “the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified (that is, set apart) in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.”

According to scripture, every child of God, whether well-known or unknown, leader or follower, is a saint. In the biblical sense, the most obscure Christian is just as much a saint as the apostle Paul. That’s what God has done for each of us. We have been declared to be God’s holy people.

Every person is either a saint or a sinner. A saint is a person who has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and, thereby, has been declared “holy” by God, being cleansed by the blood of Christ, and set apart for God’s use. A sinner is a person who has not put faith and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation and therefore, remains in a condition of unholiness in God’s sight.

Ecclesiastical saints are man-made saints. Biblical saints are God-made saints. They

are ordinary people who have listened to God's call and said, "Yes."

"The word "saint" "is used of all believers and is not applied merely to persons of exceptional holiness, or to those who, having died, were characterized by exceptional acts of 'saintliness.'" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words,)

Illust. The official name of the Mormon Church is: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." According to Bruce R. McConkie, one of their past apostles: "On April 16, 1830, Joseph Smith, his two brothers, Hyrum and Samuel, along with Oliver Cowdery and David and Peter Whitmer Jr., officially founded "The Church of Jesus Of Latter-Day Saints" because the church Jesus originally founded became apostate and LDS are the true saints of the latter days before Christ returns." (From: Gospel Principles, pp. 105-106; Mormon Doctrine, p. 44, 635).

I am a latter-day saint, not because I belong to the Mormon Church, but because I belong to Jesus Christ Who has called me a "saint" and I am living in, what I believe to be, the latter days before Jesus Christ comes for His saints!

WHERE ARE SAINTS LOCATED?

According to Roman Catholic teaching, a person must be dead to be considered for sainthood. This process and requirement is totally foreign to scripture. The purpose of that statement is to preface the answer to the question, "Where are saints located?" Saints have two addresses:

1. Our Eternal Address. "In Christ."

Phil. 1:1 "To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi";

I Cor. 1:2 "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord...." All the saved of the New Testament era are saints (hagioi) by virtue of their position "in Christ" (1 Cor 1:2; cf. Rom 6:3-4; 8:1; Eph 1:3; etc.).

2. Our Temporal Address.

According to Roman Catholic teaching, saints are either in heaven or are in some interim state. But the Bible clearly teaches us that there are saints who are alive and well on planet earth!

a. The Bible Mentions Places Where Saints Lived On Earth.

Notice some of the references to saints alive on earth in New Testament days:

- Paul wrote to living saints in Rom.1:7; I Cor. 1:2; II Cor.1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil.1:1; Col.1:2. Only living saints read their mail!
- Acts 9:13-14 - "But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your *saints* at Jerusalem; and hear he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."
- II Cor. 1:1 "To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the *saints* who are in all Achaia."
- Eph. 1:1 "To the *saints* who are in Ephesus."

- Col. 1:2 “To the *saints* and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse.” Their eternal and temporal addresses are in view here: “in Christ” and “in Colosse.”

b. The Bible Addresses Ministry For and By Living Saints.

- Present day pastors and teachers are instructed about “equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.” (Eph.4:11-12) One must be alive to be equipped!
- Paul, before his conversion, had imprisoned saints: “many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.” (Acts 26:10)
- Saints are those for whom we pray, not those to whom we pray! Rom. 8:27 “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” Eph 6:18 “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”
- Some saints have needs. In Rom. 12:13 Paul admonishes us to distribute “to the needs of the saints.” And he writes in 1 Cor. 16:1 “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:” In Rom.15:25 & 26 he says, “I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.”

All the above references are to saints alive on earth. Although saints who have died are now with the Lord above, millions of saints are living here below on earth, awaiting the time when, as II Thessalonians 1:10 says, “He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.”

HOW SHOULD SAINTS LIVE?

Saints are people who have been separated from the world and consecrated to the worship and service of God. There are many who want to live like sinners and yet have the benefits of a saint.

Illust. There is a story about two brothers who had terrorized the small town where they lived for decades. They were unfaithful to their wives, abusive to their children, and dishonest in business. They were loud, boisterous and just plain rude to nearly everyone. One day, out of the clear blue, the younger brother died. The older brother went to the preacher of the local church and said, “Preacher, I’d like you to conduct my brother’s funeral. And it’s important to me that during the service, you say my brother was a saint.”

The preacher said, “I can’t do that. We both know he was far from that.” The older brother pulled out his checkbook and said, “Preacher, I’m prepared to give \$100,000 to your church. All I’m asking is that you publicly state that my brother was a saint.”

On the day of the funeral, the preacher began his sermon this way. “Everyone here knows that the deceased was a wicked man. He was a thief, a drunk and a wife beater. He terrorized the town and cheated on his taxes.” The preacher paused for a second and then

continued, "But as evil and sinful as this man was, compared to his older brother, he was a saint!"

Ephesians 5:3-4 has this to say about how saints should live: "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."

In order to live saintly, at least two actions are necessary:

1. Holy Character Should Be Developed In Saints.

A saintly, that is, a holy lifestyle should characterize all saints and such a lifestyle begins with ones character. Character is:

- Shaped by truth;
- Resists temptation and
- Reflects outwardly the holy nature of God.

Character is to a life what a foundation is to a building and the life without holy character will eventually crumble. It is not what we do that makes us saints, but being saints should make us saintly! And it all begins with character. What we are internally determines what we do externally. Holy character ought to be evident in those who are holy children of God.

2. Holy Conduct Should Be Demonstrated By Saints.

When God claims and consecrates people for Himself and His service, He demands that they should:

- live what they are - that is, holy lives;
- represent Whose they are, that is God's people.

When we were sinners, people knew it. We lived like sinners. Ephesians 2 describes our pre-saint condition and conduct:

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Eph. 2:1-3)

Illust. In 1906, a man named Ambrose Bierce, wrote a book called "The Devil's Dictionary." In it he defined a saint as: "A dead sinner revised and edited." God did more than simply revise and edit us; when we trusted Christ, we became a new person. II Cor. 5:17 makes it plain: "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

We are the children of the holy God – God-made saints, and because we are saints, God lives within us in the person of the Holy Spirit. That means there will be something different and distinctive about the way we live. Peter reminds us that "as he who called you is holy, you

also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'" (I Peter 1:13-16). Unsaintly conduct is unbecoming for saints. Do we conduct ourselves, as Romans 16:2 says: "in a manner worthy of the saints."?

CONCLUSION

- A saint is one who has been made holy by God and set apart from sinners to serve the purpose of God.
- Saints are living witnesses for God in this world and when their earthly life is ended their heavenly life begins.
- Saints should live up to their name – that is, holiness should characterize them.

John Newton, the writer of the popular Christian song, "Amazing Grace," put the matter of being a saint in clear perspective when he wrote: "Christ has taken our nature into His heaven to represent us there and, He has left us on earth with His nature to represent Him here."

We may not have performed any miracles in order to be elevated to sainthood by man, but all God's children are saints by virtue of the miracle of the new birth which God performed! Let's live like it!

Illust. There is a story about a little girl who was visiting a beautiful cathedral with her Aunt. It was afternoon and the sun's rays were streaming through a stained glass window that featured the figures of several saints. The little girl pointed to one of the figures standing out in the strong light and asked, "Auntie, who is that?" That's Saint Peter, the aunt replied. Then pointing to another, the girl asked, "Who is that?" The aunt replied, "That's Saint John," the aunt said. When she pointed to still another she was told it was Saint James. Then, with a sigh of satisfaction, the little girl said, "Well, now I know what a saint is. A saint is somebody the light shines through."

Out of the mouth of babes

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